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PROBABLE WARNING OF SOVIET ATTACK ON THE US THROUGH MID-1957

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency; the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff; and The National Security Agency.

Concurred in by the

INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

on 14 September 1954. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Director of Intelligence, USAF; the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff; the Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the IAC. The Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of its jurisdiction.

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PROBABLE WARNING OF SOVIET ATTACK ON THE US THROUGH MID-1957

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable degree of advance warning that could be provided by intelligence in the event of Soviet attacks on the United States and key US installations overseas through mid-1957.[1]

INTRODUCTORY NOTE—THE NATURE OF WARNING

When discussing the advance warning of Soviet attack which intelligence may be able to provide, it is necessary to define various possible kinds of warning:

1. Warning of the increased likelihood of war, probably resulting either from Soviet actions or Soviet reactions to Western actions, but not necessarily involving any direct military aspect;

2. Warning of increasing Soviet military readiness to attack, but without definitive evidence of intent to attack or of the time of attack;

3. Warning of clear intent to attack;

4. Warning of clear intent to attack at or about a particular time.

It now seems improbable that stage *4.*, or possibly even stage *3.*, would be reached conclusively except in the event of high level penetration of the Soviet command, which today seems unlikely, or in case of some exceptional intelligence bonus or breakthrough. While intelligence might be able to say that the USSR would be fully prepared to attack within, say 10 days, it would find it very difficult to say whether such preparations connoted a firm intent to attack, were primarily in anticipation of an expected US attack, were a deception maneuver, or were to prepare against any contingency. When we speak of degree of warning, therefore, it is important to bear in mind that both time and specificity are involved, and that the earlier the warning the less specific it is likely to be. This inverse relation between time and specificity is an inherent limitation of the warning function.

[1] Since the Soviet attack on the US would be tantamount to general war, this estimate also deals with the over-all warning which the US would be likely to receive of Soviet initiation of general war. It does not consider the warning likely to be given by US or Allied early-warning radar.

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The fact that warning is likely to be in some degree imprecise or contingent also gives increased importance to other considerations affecting the warning function. The degree of warning which can be obtained will always be dependent on many complex factors, some of them unique to any given set of circumstances. Warning will depend first of all on maximum alertness and a maximum scale of continuous effort by intelligence. These would probably be maintained only in a period of rising tension and might be reduced, even unwittingly, if the tension ceased to rise, if there were intermittent periods of apparently declining danger, or if intelligence had previously given false warnings. The effectiveness of warning also depends on the continued credibility of intelligence warnings to responsible officials, for warning as a process is complete only when it is acted upon. The warning process is thus affected by the whole context of events in which it operates, including psychological factors and even pure chance. It cannot be regarded as a mechanical process which it is possible for intelligence to set up once and for all and which thereafter operates automatically.

CONCLUSIONS

1. We believe that a Soviet initiation of general war by attacks on the US, its allies, or key overseas installations would almost certainly be preceded by heightened political tension. While such tension would in itself constitute warning that war was becoming more likely, the indications of Soviet preparations which would probably be obtained could be interpreted as evidence of preparations for defense or as part of a war of nerves. Therefore, Soviet behavior in a period of heightened political tension would not necessarily give specific warning of a Soviet intention to attack. Nevertheless, intelligence could probably give warning of the USSR's increasing war readiness and could probably chart the trend toward a period of maximum danger.

2. If the USSR chose to initiate war with full-scale land, naval, and air attacks after a period of mobilization, there would be numerous indications of military, as well as of economic and political measures necessary to prepare such attacks. We believe that US intelligence might be able to give a generalized degree of warning as long as four or possibly even six months prior to D-Day, and that the minimum period would not be less than 30 days. After D-30 the number of indications would probably be reduced due to Soviet security measures, although the latter would themselves provide warning. From D-10, and especially D-5, there would probably be certain indications of last-minute preparations, although processing these on a timely basis would probably be difficult. As the time of attack drew near, indications of its approach would become increasingly specific. Based on observed Soviet military activities, warning could probably be given from a few hours to a few days in advance of the actual launching of the attack.

3. In order to gain some degree of surprise, the USSR might choose to initiate general war by attacks of less than full scale, for example, by an attack on Western Europe with the forces currently stationed in East Germany, while simultaneously attacking the US and key overseas installations. Even so, the minimum preparations which the USSR would have

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to take to assemble its forces in East Germany in forward positions, to put them in a state of readiness to attack, and to provide support after the attack began would probably require about 15 days. We believe that warning of the probability of attack could be given about one week in advance, but the period might vary from a few hours to as much as 10 days, depending on the seasonal pattern of Soviet military activity.

4. If the USSR chose to undertake a maximum-scale air attack on the US, employing the 850 long-range aircraft which we estimated in SNIE 11–7–54 could be launched for such an attack in 1954, extensive prior preparations would be required. We believe that the indicators would probably assume a meaningful pattern in time for intelligence to give warning 15–30 days prior to attack.

5. We have estimated in SNIE 11–7–54 that the bases in the Kola, Chukotski, and Kamchatka areas have the capacity of launching 300 aircraft in 1954.[2] However, we do not believe that they are presently capable of doing so at short notice. Accordingly, we believe it virtually impossible that an attack of this scale launched against the US in 1954 could achieve a high degree of surprise. A reduced scale of attack (e.g., 50 to 100 aircraft) might, however, achieve a high degree of surprise even in 1954.

6. By 1957 the bases, training, and equipment of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force could, by a major effort, be improved to a point where only minimum preparations would be required in advance of a maximum attack of 1,000 aircraft. In this case, the period of warning might be reduced to the time required for the staging operation at the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola bases. Intelligence might be able to discover the movement of aircraft to the staging bases, and if this movement was in fact discovered, we believe that warning could be given at least 12 hours before the attacking aircraft reached the early warning radar screen. However, if this movement was not discovered, warning of attack could be given only if continuous reconnaissance of the staging areas was being carried out. In such a case, the period of warning might be reduced to a few hours, or even virtually to zero, because of probable difficulties and delays in processing and interpreting the results of the reconnaissance.

7. There are two possible ways in which the USSR might by 1957 (and possibly somewhat before that year) launch an attack on the US in such a way that no specific warning would be likely before the actual launching of the attack:

a. Assuming that the USSR pressed ahead with development of its advance bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas, and with the general preparation of its Long-Range Air Force, a "normal" pattern of activity involving these bases would tend to be established. Under these circumstances, a considerable number of aircraft would almost certainly be able to take off from these bases (and from Leningrad) for a surprise attack upon the US without any such unusual prior preparations or assembly as

[2] The Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, and the Director of Naval Intelligence dissented from this judgment in SNIE 11–7–54 on the ground that intelligence is insufficient to warrant a finite estimate of the number of aircraft which could be launched; for the full text of the dissent, see SNIE 11–7–54, paragraph 49.

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would particularly attract the attention of Allied intelligence.

b. Assuming that the USSR acquires an inflight refueling capability (which it can do although there is no evidence at present that the Soviet Air Force is practicing this technique) and develops it to the necessary degree, Soviet long-range bombers could be launched from home bases and, without staging at advanced bases, refuel from tanker aircraft in order to attain the necessary range for attacks upon the US. We have estimated in NIE 11–4–54 that the USSR could have about 550 tanker aircraft in mid-1957. Thus, even assuming that some mission aircraft from the nearer home bases such as Leningrad required no refueling, the scale of such an attack would probably be substantially less than the maximum.

8. If the USSR, concurrently with any of the scales of attack discussed above, undertook offensive submarine operations against the US and key overseas installations, it would be necessary for the submarine fleet to proceed to wartime patrol stations shortly before the expected commencement of hostilities. The passage of these submarines, if detected, would support up to two weeks warning of Soviet preparation for attack against the US and key overseas installations.

9. Soviet preparations to receive a retaliatory blow from Allied air power would probably provide some indicators of Soviet attack. Minimum preparations would probably include the alerting of air defense forces and the civil defense organization, preparations of military units and installations for air defense, the dispatching of submarines to locate US carrier forces, the evacuation of key personnel or even considerable segments of population from potential target areas, and some measures to increase Soviet ability to recuperate from nuclear blows. If these steps were taken, they would probably provide a warning period of as much as a week to 10 days, and, taken in conjunction with other indicators, would greatly increase the definiteness of any warning US intelligence might be able to give.

DISCUSSION

I. WARNING FROM SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

10. The various possible circumstances in which the USSR might decide to attack the US and enter upon general war would have a considerable bearing on the degree of warning which might be obtained.

a. There are three situations in which the USSR might decide to attack the US and key overseas installations, thus initiating general war. These situations would arise if the Soviet leaders came to believe: (1) that the USSR had acquired such military capabilities that it could be certain of success in a general war; (2) that an attack by the US and its allies on the USSR was imminent and that the USSR's only hope of survival lay in seizing the initiative; or (3) that an irreversible shift in the relative weight of military power was impending which would ultimately force the USSR to choose between certain defeat in war and sacrifice of its vital interests. We believe that the Soviet leaders are unlikely to come to any of these conclusions during the period of this estimate.

b. There remains a possibility that general war might occur after a series of actions and counteractions in some local crisis which neither the USSR nor the Western Allies orig-

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inally intended to lead to general war. If the USSR believed that the issues at stake were vital to its security or that the loss of prestige involved in backing down would be equally dangerous to Soviet power, and if it believed that the US would not concede, then the USSR might decide that general war was the unavoidable consequence of the crisis and that it should seize the initiative. We believe that if the USSR decides to launch general war in the period through mid-1957, the decision is most likely to come as the consequence of such a situation.

11. *Likelihood of a Period of Tension.* In the situation described under *b.* above, a Soviet decision to attack the US would be preceded by a period of heightened tension. Moreover, even if the Soviet leaders reached any one of the three conclusions in *a.* above, they would probably do so because of an important shift in international alignments, or because of some equally open and marked alteration, or impending alteration, of the relative weight of military power. Such developments would themselves be likely to produce heightened political tension. There are situations, however, in which a Soviet decision for war could be taken in the absence of political tension. For example, a Soviet decision motivated as under *a.* (1) above might be the result of some technical advance in Soviet military capabilities unknown to the Western allies, or a Soviet decision motivated as under *a.* (3) above might be the result of some secret technical advance in Western military capabilities of which Soviet intelligence learned. We believe that such situations are unlikely to arise. Therefore, since an attack on the US, if it occurs, is most likely to be the result of the situation described in paragraph 10*b.* and would in that case inevitably be preceded by a period of heightened tension, we conclude that a Soviet attack on the US and key overseas installations would almost certainly be preceded by a period of heightened tension.

12. *Reliability of Political Indicators in a Period of Tension.* While the existence of a prior period of tension would in itself constitute warning that war was becoming more likely, it would also greatly increase the difficulty of obtaining from Soviet political behavior a specific warning of attack. Most of the political actions taken by the USSR during a period of war preparation might not differ greatly from those undertaken as a standard routine in any period of heightened political tension. These actions might include: diplomatic approaches to some states designed to influence them toward abandonment of their alliances with the US; massive "peace" propaganda directed at the populations of Western states and intended to undermine the will to resist or to destroy confidence in the motives and intentions of governments; explicit threats against would-be aggressors; new proposals to ban nuclear weapons; instructions to Communist parties to ready themselves for their sabotage and subversion missions in the event of war; intensified propaganda directed to the Bloc populations to prepare them psychologically for "resistance to aggression." All such actions, however, could be interpreted as defensively motivated or as part of a war of nerves. Thus while they might provide warning of the increased likelihood of general war, they would not provide specific warning of attack.

13. *Reliability of Military Indicators in a Period of Tension.* The existence of a period of heightened political tension would also make more difficult the determination from Soviet military preparations of a specific intent to attack. If in such a period the USSR undertook various military preparations, it would probably be as difficult to distinguish offensive from defensive intent as in the case of indicators from Soviet political behavior. In a protracted situation of this sort intelligence probably could only give warning of the USSR's increasing war readiness and chart the trend toward the period of maximum danger, but not warn of a Soviet intention to attack. The USSR might carry through these preparations not in order to initiate war but in readiness for instant retaliation to a US attack which it feared was impending.

14. *Possibility of Soviet Deception.* It would also be possible for the Soviet leaders, after a period of prolonged tension in which they had brought both their political and military preparations to an advanced stage, to bring about an amelioration of the crisis atmosphere as a

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deception move. They could offer concessions as a basis for new negotiations, and simulate reduction of some of their military preparations, or even actually reduce them. If they considered surprise essential to their strategic plans and believed that they still could achieve some degree of surprise in their initial attack, this would be a likely course for the Soviet leaders to pursue. However, such a course would involve sacrifice of some important advantages. An initial surprise assault aimed at Western retaliatory power would probably have to include air attacks on the territories of some states which the USSR might otherwise have had some hope of being able to neutralize politically. It would also involve the clear assumption of responsibility for initiating war by aggressive action, and thus might harden the will to resist in Western countries. However, the Soviet leaders would probably accept these disadvantages and attempt deceptive political maneuvers if they considered that the maximum degree of surprise attainable was essential to their strategic plans.

15. Although a large degree of deception could be introduced into Soviet behavior, Allied intelligence might still be able to detect the continuation of specific military preparations. Such indications could be interpreted as due to Soviet caution and mistrust, but they would also point to the possibility of a deception maneuver and they would be particularly significant as evidence of a Soviet intention to achieve surprise in launching general war.

16. *Summary.* We believe, therefore, that Soviet behavior in a period of heightened political tension would not necessarily give warning of attack. It would establish that the likelihood of general war was increasing and probably that Soviet readiness for general war was also increasing. It would also lead to heightened activity and sensitivity on the part of Allied intelligence. However, neither a belligerent and unyielding attitude nor a defensive and conciliatory one would be a sure guide to Soviet intentions.

II. WARNING OF FULL-SCALE SOVIET ATTACK

17. One course open to the USSR would be a full-scale attack on the US and simultaneously on states allied with the US, undertaken after a period of mobilization. Such a plan of attack would sacrifice strategic surprise in favor of maximum military preparation, although the USSR might still hope to achieve some degree of tactical surprise.

18. The range of activities necessary for such full mobilization of war potential in a highly industrialized state like the USSR is so extensive and involves so many measures affecting broad sections of the population that even a totalitarian government would find it impossible to conceal all of them. In the economic field, a complex redirection and intensification of productive effort would have to take place as materials, manpower, and facilities were transferred from consumption and investment goods industries to armament industries. These measures would probably be impossible without the use of public information media. Manipulation of domestic opinion is so persistent a preoccupation of the Soviet Government and its concern over popular morale under conditions of crisis is so intense that its vast propaganda apparatus would certainly be openly committed to preparing the Soviet people to withstand the strains of general war. In the military field itself, the induction of additional military classes, formation of new units and fleshing-out of existing units to full strength, intensified and more realistic training, redeployment of combat groups to forward areas in the Satellites, and a variety of logistic measures would hardly escape entirely the observation of Western intelligence. In particular, it would be difficult to avoid detection of large-scale troop movements in East Germany. Specific preparations which if detected would give warning of attack on the US would arise from the activities of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force. These are discussed in paragraphs 28–34 below.

19. We believe that we would be most likely to receive numerous indications of large-scale Soviet mobilization in the period from about six months to about one month before D-Day, largely because the preparations likely to be undertaken up to this time would be those least susceptible of concealment. From roughly D-30 to around D-10 days, however,

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we would be likely to get much less in the way of indications because the preparations in this period would be those which Soviet security is best equipped to conceal. Moreover, by about one month before D-Day the progressive tightening of Soviet security measures would probably have reached a high point. There would almost certainly be a reduction in information from sources within the Bloc; at the same time, however, the drying up of internal Bloc sources because of intensified security measures would in itself provide an indication of Soviet preparations. Then, in the period from D-10 and especially D-5 on, we could expect indications of last-minute preparations. At this time, however, there would be a serious problem of processing such indications on a sufficiently timely basis.

20. We believe that Western intelligence would probably be able to sort the variety of indicators into a meaningful pattern at a relatively early stage of Soviet mobilization for a full-scale attack. US intelligence might become aware of this mobilization as long as four or possibly even six months prior to D-Day. The minimum period would probably not be less than 30 days. Even though intelligence was able to give only a generalized degree of warning, showing the progressive increase of Soviet war readiness, it would probably still be able to chart the trend of full-scale preparations, to anticipate their probable course to completion, and thus to designate the beginning of a period of maximum danger. It might even be able to identify features of Soviet full-scale mobilization which because of their uniqueness or extreme costliness could be interpreted specifically as evidence of an intention to attack.

21. As the time of attack drew near, indications of its approach would become increasingly specific. Based on observed Soviet military activities, warning could probably be given from a few hours to a few days in advance of the actual launching of the attack. This would be rendered very difficult, however, if Soviet forces, when their preparations for attack were known to be near completion, undertook air, naval, and ground reconnaissance, or attempted major feints. These activities might provide evidence of Soviet intention to attack, but would aggravate the difficulty of determining the time of such attack. It must also be recognized that, in theory at least, the USSR could always refrain from or delay attacking even after preparations were complete. Hence the indications of military readiness, taken by themselves, would not necessarily provide conclusive evidence that attack was certain.

III. PROBABLE DEGREES OF WARNING IN THE EVENT OF LESS THAN FULL-SCALE ATTACK

22. Even if the USSR attempted to achieve the utmost surprise in initiating general war and accepted all feasible imitations on its prior preparations, it would still probably consider a minimum number of prior preparations a matter of necessity and elementary prudence in order to be in a position to wage general war. At least some of the general preparations discussed in Section II above would almost certainly have to be undertaken, even if a high degree of prior mobilization was foregone. Some of these preparations would be detected by Allied intelligence, but it might be very difficult to ascertain any such clear pattern of preparations as would be discernible in event of mobilization for full-scale attack. Consequently, we believe it possible, though unlikely, that these preparations would not lead to a warning of attack, especially if they were carried out over a long period of time and with careful concealment.

23. If the USSR attacked the US and key overseas installations without full prior mobilization for general war, and hence without full-scale attacks in other areas, two general alternatives would be open:

a. The USSR could combine its attack against the US and key overseas installations with a ground campaign chiefly in Western Europe without prior reinforcement of its forces in East Germany.[3]

b. The USSR could undertake initially air, and possibly other forms of attack, against

[3] The USSR could of course strengthen this ground attack by some degree of prior reinforcement. For the purpose of this estimate, however, we take the above case as the limiting one: i.e., any prior reinforcement would tend to provide additional indicators and hence additional warning.

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the US and key overseas installations, but delay its ground campaigns and discernible preparations for other military operations until after these initial attacks.

Soviet Campaign in Western Europe and Simultaneous Attacks on the US and Key Overseas Installations

24. If the USSR chose to initiate general war by an attack on Western Europe with the forces currently stationed in East Germany and the Satellites, together with attacks on the US and key overseas installations, the degree of its over-all war preparations before such attacks would vary greatly depending on the intensity and duration of the political tensions which preceded the attack. If, as we think likely, there had been a long period of crisis, the USSR might have already achieved a considerable degree of military and economic mobilization for war, and its foreign and domestic political preparation might be well advanced. Therefore, as we have noted, the indicators derived from this range of activities, though warning of the increased likelihood of war, would probably be of limited significance for warning of this type of attack.

25. Even so, the local preparations which the USSR would still have to take at a minimum for an attack with forces stationed in East Germany would provide some degree of warning. Some time would be required to assemble major elements in forward positions, although this would vary seasonally. (The longest period required would be between May and August when units are split between home stations and field training areas; a lesser period would be required between November and March when units are consolidated at home stations; the minimum period required would be in April when units are moving to training areas and in September–October when units are either engaged in large-scale maneuvers or are being moved back to home stations.) Other minimum preparations would include the release from stocks of transport, munitions, and supplies in quantities well in excess of those used even on full-scale maneuvers. In addition, some two weeks before the attack it would probably be necessary to begin the movement of large numbers of locomotives and rolling stock from East Germany to the Soviet border in order to prepare for resupply and reinforcement operations to support and expand the offensive. Altogether, the USSR would probably be engaged in these preparations over a period of about 15 days and US intelligence would probably begin to acquire some indicators at an early stage, although varying with the season of the year. We believe that warning of the probability of attack could be given about one week in advance. However, in the absence of other indicators and with Soviet actions appearing to be part of a normal pattern the warning could vary as follows:

(a) from a few hours to a few days in April and in September–October;
(b) from two to five days in the period November–March;
(c) from five to 10 days in the period May–August.

26. If the USSR undertook concurrent offensive submarine operations against the US and key overseas installations, it would be necessary for the submarine fleet to proceed to wartime patrol stations shortly before the expected commencement of hostilities. The passage of these submarines, if detected, would support up to two weeks warning of Soviet preparation for attack against the US and key overseas installations.

27. The extent to which the preparations going on simultaneously for air attack on the US and key overseas installations would tend to confirm and/or advance the warning would depend somewhat upon the planned scale of these attacks, as discussed below.

Initial Attacks on the US and Key Overseas Installations

28. For the purposes of this estimate it appears necessary to consider two types of air attacks on the US and key overseas installations: (a) a maximum effort using as many aircraft as possible; (b) an attack designed to achieve a high degree of surprise. The USSR could undertake these air attacks on the US and key overseas installations simultaneously

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with a full-scale attack or with the ground campaign and submarine operations discussed in paragraphs 24–27. Alternatively, the USSR could initiate general war with such air attacks only, while delaying discernible preparations for other military operations in order to increase the likelihood of surprise against the US. In this case, the very disparity between preparations for long-range air operations and those for other general war campaigns would be a highly significant indicator of the probable nature of the initial Soviet attack.

29. *Maximum Scale Attack.* We have estimated in SNIE 11–7–54 that by exercising its maximum capability the USSR could now launch 850 long-range aircraft against the US in an initial attack and that by 1957 this number could be increased to 1,000.[4] Extensive prior preparations would be required, particularly in the early part of the period covered by this estimate. These would include improving airfields, maintenance and fuel storage facilities in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas, bringing personnel and equipment to full strength in long-range air units, intensified training of air personnel, increased frequency of long-distance training missions, and raising levels of maintenance.

30. At present such activities would require at least several months and would probably become known to US intelligence, especially if carried forward with great urgency. Throughout the period of this estimate the critical indicators would be those relating to increased levels of activity at staging bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas. We believe that the indicators would probably assume a meaningful pattern in time for intelligence to give a generalized degree of warning 15–30 days prior to attack. On the other hand, such preparations could be undertaken gradually over the next few years. By 1957 the bases, training, and equipment of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force could be advanced to a point where only minimum preparations would be required in advance of an attack. For example, it might not then be necessary to undertake such final preparations as the movement of personnel and equipment, or these preparations might be on such a reduced scale that they might not be discovered. Under these circumstances, indicators of the preparations taking place in the Soviet Long-Range Air Force might be few, and warning of air attack would depend almost entirely on indicators received during the staging of aircraft through advanced bases.

31. In the course of the staging process Allied intelligence might be able to discover the movement of aircraft to the staging bases. If this movement was in fact discovered, we believe that in 1954 warning could be given at least 24 hours before the attacking aircraft reached the early warning radar screen. By 1957, increased handling capability at staging bases and reduction of flight time by increased speeds of jet aircraft might decrease the warning derived from discovery of movement of aircraft to staging bases to a minimum of about 12 hours before attacking aircraft reached the early warning radar screen. However, if this movement was not discovered, warning of attack could be given only if continuous reconnaissance of the staging areas was being carried out. In such a case, the period of warning might be reduced to a few hours, or even virtually to zero, because of probable difficulties and delays in processing and interpreting the results of the reconnaissance.

32. If US overseas installations were to be attacked simultaneously, the additional preparations which would be necessary would not add significantly to the risks of detection. The long-range air arm would already be in a maximum condition of readiness and the readying of the IL–28 light bomber units which would be used for attacks on US installations in Western Europe, the UK, and some parts of the Middle East could be accomplished without serious additional risk of detection. If guided missiles were employed in such attacks, no warning of their use would be obtained, apart from the generalized warning which might have been derived from prior preparations.

33. *Surprise Attack.* We have estimated in SNIE 11–7–54 that if the USSR attempted a

[4] The warning problem would probably not be significantly different if some portion of these aircraft were tankers.

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surprise attack against the US in 1954, aircraft would probably be launched from staging bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas. The capacity of these bases was estimated to be 300 aircraft.[5] We do not believe, however, that these bases are currently ready to launch this scale of attack on short notice. Preparations would be required, which would probably be detected by Allied intelligence and would permit a generalized degree of warning of about 15 to 30 days. Accordingly, we believe it virtually impossible that an attack of this scale against the US during 1954 could achieve a high degree of surprise. A reduced scale of attack (e.g., 50 to 100 aircraft) might, however, achieve a high degree of surprise even in 1954.

34. In 1957, as is evident from paragraphs 30 and 31 above, the USSR, could, provided base construction, training, and equipment of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force were sufficiently advanced, launch its maximum air attack of 1,000 aircraft against the US under such conditions that the period of warning would probably be of the order of 12 hours, but might be considerably less if the movement of aircraft to staging bases was not discovered. The maximum Soviet air attack could thus achieve a high degree of surprise. Even if the USSR chose to reduce substantially the total number of aircraft, participating in the attack, it would still probably use the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola bases to full capacity, and therefore not greatly reduce the likelihood of discovery of aircraft moving to staging bases.

35. There are two possible ways in which the USSR might by 1957 (and possibly somewhat before that year) launch an attack on the US in such a way that no specific warning would be likely before the actual launching of the attack:

a. Assuming that the USSR pressed ahead with development of its advance bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas, and with the general preparation of its Long-Range Air Force, "normal" flights of aircraft to and from these bases would almost certainly occur in increasing number as the development of the bases progresses. A pattern of activity would tend to be established. Under these circumstances, a considerable number of aircraft would almost certainly be able to take off from these bases (and from Leningrad) for a surprise attack upon the US without any such unusual prior preparations or assembly as would particularly attract the attention of Allied intelligence. We are unable to estimate the number of aircraft which might be in a position to participate in such an attack.

b. Assuming that the USSR acquires an in-flight refueling capability (which it can do although there is no evidence at present that the Soviet Air Force is practicing this technique) and develops it to the necessary degree, Soviet long-range bombers could also be launched from home bases and, without staging at advanced bases, refuel from tanker aircraft in order to attain the necessary range for attacks upon the US. We have estimated in NIE 11–4–54 that the USSR could have about 550 tanker aircraft in mid-1957. Thus, even assuming that some mission aircraft from the nearer home bases such as Leningrad required no refueling, the scale of such an attack would be substantially less than the maximum.

IV. WARNING FROM SOVIET PREPARATIONS TO RECEIVE RETALIATORY ATTACKS

36. An important element not included in the foregoing examination is that of Soviet defensive preparations to receive a retaliatory blow from Allied air power. Minimum preparations would probably include the alerting of air defense forces and the civil defense organization, preparations of military units and installations for air defense, the dispatching of submarines to locate US carrier forces, the evacuation of key personnel or even considerable segments of population from potential target areas, and some measures to increase Soviet ability to recuperate from nuclear blows. If these steps were not taken,

[5] The Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, and the Director of Naval Intelligence dissented from this judgment in SNIE 11–7–54 on the ground that intelligence is insufficient to warrant a finite estimate of the number of aircraft which could be launched; for the full text of the dissent, see SNIE 11–7–54, paragraph 49.

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they would constitute serious limitations on the USSR's ability to withstand a retaliatory blow. If they were taken, they would probably provide a warning period of as much as a week to 10 days, and, taken in conjunction with other indicators, would greatly increase the definiteness of any warning US intelligence might be able to give. The risk which the USSR would be willing to accept as a result of neglecting some or all of this type of defensive preparation would depend in part on the degree of success which the Soviet leaders expected their own initial attack to achieve. We believe that in elementary prudence they would be unwilling to forego all preparation to receive a retaliatory blow, and some important indicators of this type would probably be obtained.

V. THE PROBABLE SOVIET CHOICE BETWEEN A FULL-SCALE AND A SURPRISE ATTACK

37. The Soviet choice between a full-scale attack or some one of the alternative scales of surprise attack would probably depend in part on the intensity and duration of the crisis which preceded the Soviet decision to attack. The preference shown in Soviet military doctrine for offensive action only after maximum preparation and a high degree of superiority to the enemy has been achieved might argue for the postponement of decision to the last possible moment. A prolonged crisis might thus result during which Soviet general mobilization would be brought near to completion. This might make full-scale attack feasible and would also facilitate deception. On the other hand, the USSR might estimate that the process of mobilization itself, especially if it included forward movement of large bodies of troops into the Satellite area, would cause a Western miscalculation and result in the initial attack being made on rather than by the USSR.

38. Probably the decisive argument for a Soviet surprise attack, however, would be the overwhelming importance to the USSR of effectively blunting US retaliatory power and disrupting US mobilization. We believe that in the period through mid-1957 the Soviet leaders, if they decided to initiate war, would consider some form of surprise attack essential to achieving their objectives, and that they would therefore give highest priority to achievement of a substantial degree of surprise against the continental US and key installations overseas.

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MEMORANDUM FOR HOLDERS OF SNIE 11-8-54

SUBJECT: Correction

Please make the following correction in SNIE 11-8-54, "Probable Warning of Soviet Attack on the US Through Mid-1957": at page 7, para. 22, line 3: delete "imitations," substitute "limitations."

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
12 October 1954

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ESTIMATES IN "ORIS"

= ESTIMATES - VIEW/OBTAIN FROM NARA

+ = PG. COUNT CONFIRMED

(SAN) = SANITIZED

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